

MDC Urban Deer Management Guidelines

Revised June 2008

Background:

The Urban Deer Management Program of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) encourages urban development that conserves green space and native wildlife populations using science-based management to maintain wildlife populations at levels compatible with urban and suburban lifestyles.

The Role of MDC in this Program is to serve as a technical advisor and provide assistance when deemed necessary to communities that desire assistance in managing urban deer populations. MDC guides deer population assessment and goal setting, informs individuals and communities on lethal and non-lethal methods of management that can help minimize conflict between deer and humans, advises regarding statutory language that is compatible with deer management goals, cultivates public awareness of deer population impacts, and authorizes management efforts.

The Goal of the MDC Urban Deer Management Program is to assist individuals and communities as requested in the management of white-tailed deer by providing management expertise, deer management plans, and population control options that provide residents and communities effective ways to manage deer in accordance with MDC Urban Deer Management Guidelines and wildlife laws while keeping in mind all state, county, and municipal laws.

MDC Responsibilities and Strategies:

As trustee for the fish, forest, and wildlife resources of Missouri, MDC is mandated to provide management programs governed by sound ecological principles for the conservation of these resources. The Department strives to maintain statewide deer populations at densities compatible with habitat types and that provide for public utilization and enjoyment while minimizing deer-human conflicts.

Although MDC is responsible for statewide deer management, the Department does not implement deer management programs on non-MDC lands without consent and cooperation of landowners. MDC serves in an extension role to evaluate deer populations, advise on appropriate management strategies, and establish geographic and regulatory boundaries through which feasible management alternatives can be developed. Successful implementation of management alternatives can only be accomplished with landowner consent and approval. Therefore, extensive effort to inform and educate landowners is essential.

On MDC managed properties, hunting is utilized to control deer populations whenever practical. On most public areas in urban settings, deer hunting access must be controlled due to high public use and close proximity to human development. Hunting in or near urban areas may initiate controversy among hunting and anti-hunting groups, especially where hunting has not occurred in the recent past. Such responses should be anticipated

so that appropriate educational and public relations efforts can be incorporated in hunt development and implementation.

Urban deer management falls into two broad categories: management on public lands and management on private lands. Expansion of deer hunting opportunities and programs on public lands in urban areas will continue. MDC will continue to implement managed deer hunts on Department lands in urban areas where necessary to control expanding deer populations. Such programs should be maintained at levels consistent with appropriate and acceptable deer densities. MDC will work cooperatively and form partnerships with public landowners, such as local governments and other state and federal agencies, to promote development of managed hunts in urban areas where practical. Specific urban areas will continue to be designated as urban deer management zones, with special regulations developed as necessary for hunting programs designed to control expanding deer populations. Wherever feasible, MDC will work closely with private landowners to encourage deer hunting opportunities on their lands.

Department Guidelines for Urban Deer Management Programs:

Regulations enacted each year by MDC establish deer harvest levels within the framework of the statewide deer management program. MDC, however, lacks direct control over access to private and much public land, including urban sites. The following guidelines apply to deer population control and human-deer conflict on non-MDC public and private land in predominantly urban and suburban areas of Missouri.

- 1) Successful deer management on non-MDC lands within the MDC regulations framework requires cooperation of private citizen and local government landowners.
 - a) MDC personnel will provide expertise in evaluating the problem and advise on appropriate management strategies.
 - b) Implementation of a deer management plan is the landowners' responsibility, with MDC acting in an advisory and support capacity.
- 2) Deer herd control concerns and human-deer conflicts in the 4 major metropolitan areas of the state (Kansas City, St. Louis, Springfield - Joplin, and Columbia - Jefferson City) will be directed to the Urban Wildlife Biologist or the Wildlife Management Biologist assigned urban responsibilities. Deer control problems in smaller urban areas of the state will be directed to the local Conservation Agent and/or Wildlife Damage Biologist.
 - a) In the major metropolitan areas, the Urban Wildlife Biologist, with Resource Scientist support and assistance, will have primary responsibility for resolution of human-deer conflicts and urban deer control programs.
 - i) The Resource Scientist will provide expertise in deer population assessment, management planning, and evaluation of herd reduction and removal methods.
 - ii) The Urban Wildlife Biologist will direct conflict resolution, team building, removal proposals, permit application, and associated administrative requisites.
 - b) In complex urban situations where potential controversy exists, the Urban Wildlife Biologist, Wildlife Management Biologist, Wildlife Damage Biologist and/or Conservation Agent may assist with the organization of a local committee

- that includes government officials, involved landowners, concerned citizens, and Department of Conservation representatives to assess the problem and evaluate and recommend management options.
- c) In urban areas without an Urban Wildlife Biologist, the Conservation Agent and/or Wildlife Damage Biologist will assess the problem and make specific control recommendations or consult with the Resource Scientist on potential management programs.
- 3) Urban deer control measures include the following, some of which require a permit(s):
- a) Non-lethal:
 - i) No action
 - ii) Habitat modification
 - iii) Repellants (chemical, noise, etc.)
 - iv) Fencing
 - v) No deer feeding ordinances
 - b) Lethal:
 - i) Statewide regulated or managed hunting (permit required)
 - ii) Sharp shooting (permit required)
 - iii) Trapping and euthanasia (permit required)
- 4) A standing subcommittee of the Regulations Committee, known as the Urban Deer Task Force, will review situations and requests for deer control outside of these guidelines and procedures. The Task Force will recommend appropriate control action and removal protocol, and be responsible for updates and revisions to the Guidelines as necessary and/or mandated.
- 5) An MDC and/or landowner(s) evaluation of initial control effectiveness may be required. Control activities may be modified to maintain long term effectiveness.
- 6) In those situations where managed deer hunting is the most viable control option, a hunt specific regulatory mechanism, such as longer seasons, additional seasons, higher per hunter bag limit, sex-specific harvest, and others, will be developed as needed to control deer population densities.
- 7) Wildlife Division, in conjunction with all Department divisions and local communities, will compile and maintain an information system on urban deer populations that includes number and severity of deer-human conflicts, number of deer-vehicle accidents, public complaints of deer damage, and other related information as appropriate. This information will aid in the identification of, planning for, and response to, urban deer conflicts, and will be directed by the Urban Wildlife Biologist or the Wildlife Management Biologist assigned urban responsibilities.
- 8) Where and when practical, Resource Science Division will assess deer population status and make recommendations for optimum deer densities for a specific area based on deer habitat availability, management goals, and landowner objectives.
- a) Resource Science Division will assess efficacy of control methods and their potential for application in Missouri, and make appropriate recommendations.

Operational Procedures for Site-Specific Urban Deer Management Programs on Lands Not Managed by MDC:

The following management protocol is recommended for administration and implementation of urban deer management plans and programs. However, landowners choosing not to follow established MDC deer management protocol can make management decisions within the MDC legal framework.

- 1) In order to implement deer management programs within urban areas, a cooperative relationship with landowners must be developed. MDC will provide technical advice and information on advantages and disadvantages of various management strategies and afford opportunity for management through its regulatory authority.
- 2) The Urban Wildlife Biologist will be the initial contact for urban deer control concerns in the major metropolitan areas of the state. In other areas of the state, the local Conservation Agent and/or Wildlife Biologist will be notified.
- 3) In case of single ownership and small deer numbers, non-lethal or lethal methods can be implemented in accordance with the Wildlife Conflicts Handbook.
- 4) Where multiple ownerships occur or the property is controlled by city, county, state, or federal government, formation of a community task force consisting of representative MDC staff and community leadership is recommended to address the issues, develop alternatives, and recommend appropriate action.
- 5) In situations involving multiple landowners, a standard citizen opinion survey designed by MDC may be administered to all landowners if required or requested. Administration and analysis of the survey must be approved by MDC.
- 6) MDC and/or MDC approved assignee may conduct deer population surveys to determine current deer densities and recommend population goals, when necessary and/or requested.
- 7) In the absence of a landowner and/or deer population survey, on-site evaluation will be used to determine the need for and conditions of a deer removal permit.
- 8) Following monitoring and assessment, the community task force should develop a deer management plan that establishes deer population goals and defines management alternatives. MDC will assist with plan development by providing necessary expertise and information on population assessment and management; control alternatives, and regulatory guidelines requiring compliance. The plan will facilitate data collection on the problem, pull diverse groups together in a concerted effort, and encourage constructive solutions to the problem. The plan should include the following information:
 - a) Title - course of action and the name of the agency/organization requesting MDC assistance in deer population control.
 - b) Introduction - Brief description of the area, its location or address and size. Definitive statement on the problem(s) caused by deer.
 - c) Goal - long term purpose of the management program.
 - d) Objective - specific description of management tasks to be accomplished at this time.
 - e) Site Description - detailed description of the area, estimated deer numbers, and history of deer management problems.

- f) Documentation of deer-related damage or potential safety hazards - cost estimates of damage, potential or actual safety hazards to the public.
- g) Proposed methods and procedures - the number of animals to be removed and the recommended techniques to accomplish the short and long term goals. Names and telephone numbers of the contractors/volunteers that will perform the work, urban officials to be contacted by members of the media and the general public concerning the project. For many management methods this section may also need to include information on how to deal with protests, set up check stations, organize public meetings, and similar public relations specifics.
- h) Evaluation - a description of the criteria used to determine the progress of the management program.
- i) Schedule - establish a timetable for implementation of the program.
- j) Support Documents – additional support documents as necessary.
- 9) An MDC permit is required for removal of deer by any method other than statewide hunting or managed hunt regulations. This permit will specify all removal criteria based on protocols submitted by the landowner(s) or community task force and approved by MDC.
- 10) MDC will be the primary advocate on first-time managed deer hunts on MDC lands in urban areas. However, appropriate citizens, citizen groups, and other government agencies having an interest in population management of deer on the proposed lands should be involved in the planning process, and relevant public relations and educational strategies should be implemented as part of the proposed hunt.

Urban Deer Population Control Alternatives

Where control of deer numbers is required, only the following techniques (each summarized with a summary of realistic expectations) are recognized by MDC as potential management options:

- 1) *Legal hunting* may occur under statewide deer hunting regulations or during a special managed hunt outside the normal season framework. Managed hunts must receive Commission approval.
 - a) Firearms hunting is the most efficient way to reduce deer populations but may not be practical in all urban areas.
 - b) Archery hunting can be effective and safe when constraints are placed on the age/sex and number of deer that can be taken.
 - c) Crossbows and draw-locking devices are tools that can be used during certain seasons and have shown to be effective deer management tools in urban settings.
 - d) Persons with disabilities and youth-only hunts may be considered for urban settings. Persons with disabilities could be assisted by approved civic groups or others deemed qualified. Such hunts could serve as both resource management strategies and urban management promotional strategies.
 - e) Hunter orientation sessions should be required prior to these special hunts if local staff think conflicts could arise between hunters, area users, and/or neighbors.
- 2) *Sharp shooting* by trained marksmen over bait can be an effective deer removal technique where location renders legal firearms hunting unsafe and archery hunting is not a feasible control mechanism. Small caliber center fire rifles are most effective

and are safe when used under controlled situations. Deer taken by sharp shooters will be processed by approved facilities and donated for use. MDC will not be responsible for compensating contracted sharp shooters or for meat processing. Communities should be aware that sharp shooting is not a one time solution and needs to be followed up with an annual population maintenance program.

- 3) *Live Trapping and Euthanasia* using bait should be considered only in special circumstances and should be conducted in a humane and socially acceptable manner under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian or a trained contractor. Landowners will be responsible for all trapping, euthanasia, and processing costs. MDC, in some instances and on a limited basis, may have traps to loan out to individuals or communities.
- 4) *Reproductive control* can be implemented only with Federal and MDC approval and when proven to be an effective population control method. Landowners will be responsible for all procedures and associated costs. Landowners may be required to monitor and record trapping and reproductive control efforts.
 - a) *Live trapping and sterilization* is presently not an efficient or cost effective population control technique because it requires animal capture, administration of drugs or surgery, high stress to animals, and produces little if any reduction in deer density.
 - b) *Contraception* procedures are presently under strict Federal authority and not legal in most situations. Presently, they are neither cost-effective nor biologically feasible population management techniques, but may hold promise for future urban deer population management and may be considered if they prove safe, effective, and practical in controlling numbers.

Urban Deer Population Control-Prohibited Actions

Live Trapping and Transfer is NOT allowed as a deer management alternative because high mortality is associated with the process and there are risks of spreading deer diseases and parasites.